Chapter 7: Land Use

Existing Land Use

An existing land use map categorizes every parcel by its predominate land use. This plan represents the second update to the initial land use map created in 1991. The Department of Community Affairs Minimum Planning Standards state that the overall goal of the land use element is to "Ensure that land resources are allocated for uses that will accommodate and enhance economic development, natural and historic resources, community facilities, and housing; and to protect and improve residents quality of life."

This element is divided into four major sections. The first discusses the existing land use map and breaks down the acreage within each of the land use categories. The second section provides an assessment of the existing land use patterns and how they have formed over the years, as well as the acreage requirements for each of the categories based on earlier analysis in the previous chapters. The third section illustrates the future land use map and outlines the community's preferences for the general location of land uses. Finally, a set of needs goals and policies are presented to help guide the community in land development decisions.

Existing Land Use Acreages

The Existing Land Use map illustrates the type of development that exists in the town and outlines those areas that have yet to be developed. Every parcel of land is assessed according to its use and this information is transferred to a parcel coverage map of the entire town to produce the existing land use map.

Table 1 presents the total acreage according to the following land use categories; Single-Family Residential, Multi-Family Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Government, Public/Institutional, Parks/Recreation/Conservation, Transportation/Communication/Utilities, and Undeveloped/Unused.

Figure 1 illustrates the changes in developed land since the 1997 Comprehensive Plan land use inventory. The most significant difference is the change in residential acreage. The 1997 plan reported that 422.4 total acres were utilized for residential purposes, or 26.9%. This figure has grown to 743.7 total acres, or 47.1%, representing a 76% increase. The majority of this difference can be accounted for in the corresponding decrease in both Agriculture (representing a 49.2% decrease) and Undeveloped/Unused (representing a 21.5% decrease) land use categories.

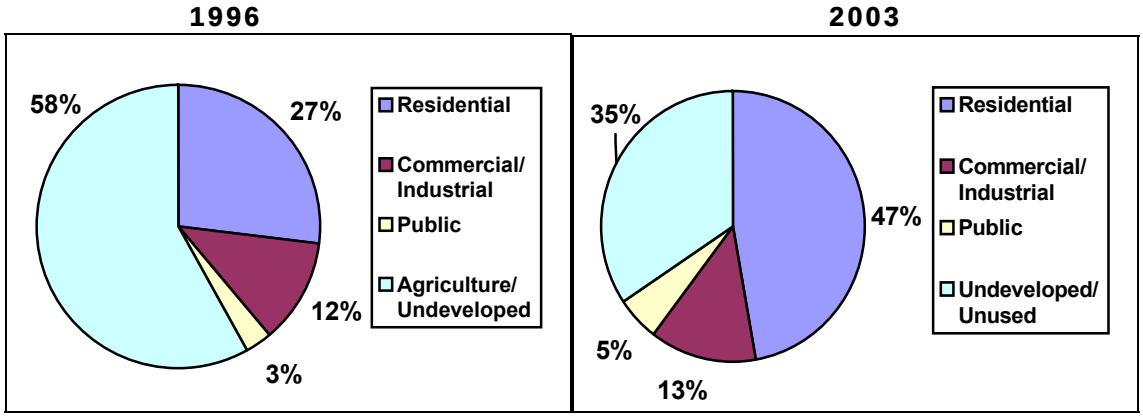
Table 1
2003 Existing Land Use Acreage

Land Use	Acres	% of Total
Total Residential	743.7	47.1
Single-Family	*721.6*	*45.7*
Multi-Family	*12.6*	*0.8*
Mobile Home	*9.5*	*0.6*
Commercial	32.5	2.0
Industrial	177.6	11.3
Government	18.7	1.2
Public/Institutional	61.5	3.9
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	18.5	1.2
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	0	0
Agriculture	343.5	21.8

Land Use	Acres	% of Total
Undeveloped/Unused	182.2	11.5
Totals	**1,578.2**	**100.0%**

Source: City of Hoschton; calculations by NEGRDC

Figure 1
1996-2002 Comparison



Source: NEGRDC

*Public includes government, public institutional, and transportation/communication/utilities and Agriculture/Undeveloped includes agriculture/crop forest, undeveloped/unused, and parks/recreation/conservation.

Land Use Trends

There has been very little annexation that has taken place since the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. A total of 11.8 acres have been added, with nearly all shifts in land use taking place within the original city boundary.

Hoschton has seen a tremendous increase in residential development, as illustrated in Figure 1 and in the previous discussion on housing in Chapter 6. The majority of this development has occurred at the expense of land previously considered Agriculture or Undeveloped/Unused. Low-Density Single Family Residential development continues to dominate the residential totals (representing 63% of the total residential acreage), however there has been a sharp increase in the amount of medium and high-density development occur over the past 6 years. This has been the main trend in residential development as subdivisions are increasingly connecting to the sewer system allowing higher overall densities.

Land Use Assessment

Historical Factors

Hoschton was considered a vibrant community, with a strong local economy in the early-to-mid 1900's but suffered a similar fate of many other towns its size with the loss of the railroad. Remnants of the once vibrant local economy remain in the downtown historic district, but it is apparent that the majority of new investment has occurred in the fringe areas of the city, in industrial parks and subdivisions, over the past decade.

Existing land development patterns can be largely attributed to the increased suburbanization of metropolitan Atlanta. As the City of Atlanta has grown, urban residents have continued to seek housing further away from the city center. The location of Hoschton, within proximity to a major transportation route and employment centers,

has created an ideal small town environment that appeals to urban dwellers. The dominance of single-family households and the increasing median housing values further illustrate the demographic that is moving into the area.

Land Use Patterns and Infrastructure Availability

Infrastructure is an umbrella term that relates to many of the community facilities and services referred to in Chapter 5. Certain types of infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and roads influence where and how much development occurs. Other types, such as police, fire, ambulance, and education are influenced by where and how much development occurs. Two of the most influential infrastructure networks on the town's development patterns have been the proximity of a major transportation network and the availability of a sewer system.

Transportation is one of the strongest influences on land use patterns. Travel behavior and the existence of roads have a direct impact on the location of new development. As previously mentioned, the availability of an efficient transportation network was one of the largest contributing factors to existing development patterns. The existing land use map illustrates that growth has occurred along, and within proximity to the major thoroughfare, GA Highway 53. The increased residential development can be largely attributed to Hoschton's proximity to the Interstate 85 corridor.

The improved efficiency of road networks has led to increased reliance on automobile travel, which is reflected in the way we develop our neighborhoods. The most prominent features of subdivisions are garages, driveways, wide roads, and a lack of sidewalks. The increased mobility of the population, in general, has led to a drastic decrease in mixed-use and neighborhood commercial development and has decreased mobility options through a forced reliance on the automobile, even for the shortest of trips.

The unavailability of sewer throughout unincorporated areas surrounding Hoschton has not allowed for the construction of higher density residential developments. This has led to an increase in higher density developments within Hoschton to take advantage of the sewer system.

Local Development Policies

The town has updated its Future Land Use map since the completion of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan (in 2001) and continues to utilize the map closely in all development decisions. This has helped both planning commissioners and government officials in the decision making process concerning the appropriate locations of new development. The city chose to develop an entire comprehensive plan in 2003 to direct future development and allow them to make informed decisions based on the city's best interests.

The traditional zoning code has led to an increased separation of uses and reinforced the notion of sprawling development throughout the suburbs. The primary focus of zoning and land use controls is to ensure a quality development that is compatible with its surrounding area. Another common theme in traditional zoning is the protection of adjacent and surrounding property values. This is not an inherently harmful notion but has increased the separation of uses. It has gone so far as to separate different styles of the same use. This is particularly apparent in the siting of residential development, and the trend has been to create a homogeneous development of similarly priced home that does not have direct access to any surrounding subdivisions. It has created an exclusionary housing environment that can severely limit options for a low-to-moderate income family.

This is not solely a reflection on Hoschton, but an illustration of how traditional zoning has evolved. The city has expressed an interest in developing a downtown overlay zoning district to increase the amount of mixed-use development in the downtown trying to bring employment and shopping closer to the population.

Environmental Issues

The ability to develop a parcel of land is directly related to the environmental constraints present on that parcel. Environmental constraints vary widely from the presence of wetlands to the inability of soil to absorb septic wastewater. Refer to Chapter 4A, Natural Resources, for a more detailed discussion on the environmental features present throughout Hoschton.

Some of the most obvious environmental constraints are the presence of floodplains, wetlands, or steep slopes. Some of the less obvious environmental constraints are much more difficult to regulate and have the potential to pose greater development restrictions in the future if they are mismanaged now. One of the largest issues, not only in Hoschton but also throughout the state, is the protection of water quality. Water quality is affected by a multitude of variables including raw sewage, urban runoff, poorly maintained septic systems, farm-animal wastes, and in a single phrase, sprawling development.

Another of the less obvious environmental constraints relates to the air quality of the region. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) air quality standards, the 13-county Atlanta region is considered a non-attainment area. Sprawling development patterns have increased the reliance on the automobile and forced people to drive greater distances to their workplace. The increased road traffic has led to increased vehicular emissions to the point that air quality in the metro area does not meet the EPA's standards.

This is no longer solely a Metro Atlanta problem as the level of traffic has continually increased in the surrounding counties. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is currently undergoing Phase II of a suburban county study identifying areas outside of the 13-county region that are approaching non-attainment status. Barrow County is included in Phase II, and has recently been added to the Metropolitan Atlanta Urbanized Area. Jackson County did not meet the thresholds required for consideration as part of the Atlanta Urbanized Area, but increased traffic congestion and vehicular travel is cause for concern.

These are problems that do not know political boundaries and cannot be solved by a single jurisdiction. In order to fully combat these problems full cooperation is needed on a regional scale.

Opportunities for Infill Development

The notion of infill development is quite simple and refers to maximizing development in areas already served by infrastructure before developing in areas requiring infrastructure expansion. Traditionally this requires urban areas that have experienced disinvestment within traditional downtown commercial. Generally, there is already water, sewer, transportation, and in many cases the actual physical infrastructure present. Downtown revitalization projects can generate a more vibrant downtown district through mixed-use residential and commercial projects.

The majority of Hoschton's economic growth has occurred in the southeastern portion of town, along GA Highway 53, in the designated commercial and industrial parks. This has reduced investment in the historic downtown district. The city has targeted the downtown for appropriate, architecturally compatible mixed-use, infill development in the hopes of revitalizing the area and creating a greater downtown identity.

Future Land Use

Assessment of Needs

Throughout this document each of the elements has provided a set of needs, goals or policies that relate to the future development of the town. Each of the elements is highlighted here in terms of how their needs affect the development of the future land use plan.

Economic Development

The major issue stemming from the economic development section is creating a better match between the local labor force and local employment opportunities. The percentage of the labor force that commutes is over 90% (as documented in Chapter 3). The city must increase its ability to attract quality employers to take advantage of the increasingly educated labor force that has migrated into Hoschton. Maximizing employment opportunities will help to reduce traffic flow, generate greater tax revenues needed for increased service provision, and rejuvenate the communities' downtown business district.

The success of the economic development initiatives is necessary not only from a local revenue perspective, but also with regards to environmental preservation, and reducing the impacts of sprawling development. In order to significantly reduce the amount of automobile emissions and mitigate the impacts of sprawl, commuting trips must be dramatically reduced through increased local employment.

While this is an important aspect of the future development of Hoschton, residents feel strongly that economic development should not occur at the expense of the natural or historic environment. These local features are very important to the citizens and contribute to the high quality of life experienced in Hoschton.

Natural and Historic Resources

The preservation of existing resources, both natural and historical, is a key element of future development within Hoschton. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the downtown core represents the history of Hoschton as well as future opportunity for economic and community growth. The reuse and rehabilitation of historic structures within the downtown core provide opportunity to invest in the revitalization of the downtown historic district, increasing its economic viability.

New development generally leads to loss of vegetative cover, which in turn can create water quality issues. The city hopes to encourage the preservation of undisturbed vegetative buffers along all waterways and increase the amount of land available for open space. The availability of open/green space and the preservation of existing natural features of Hoschton are important in preserving the rural character of the town. Similarly to historic resources, residents feel that development should not take priority over natural resource preservation.

Community Facilities and Services

The timing and location of facility and service expansion is a major contributor to the city's ability to manage growth. Focusing new developments into those areas that can accommodate them with the necessary infrastructure is the key to the successful management of future growth.

The ability to develop in a compact fashion decreases the costs associated with providing the required infrastructure and creates population clusters that are easier to service. Compact development that preserves greenspace also increases recreational opportunities without the need to drive. It facilitates the implementation of a sidewalk or trail network minimizing unnecessary automobile trips.

Housing

Suburban development creates a homogeneous environment dominated by single-family residential development. The dominance of a single type of housing limits options and segregates populations based on socioeconomic characteristics. The stigmas attached to "affordable" homes prevent their inclusion in a typical subdivision forcing low-to-moderate wage earners elsewhere to locate housing. The city feels that it has an appropriate mix of housing types and housing values to meet the population's demands. As the city population grows and the amount of developable land decreases decisions on the type and density of residential development must be made to maximize the efficient use of available land.

The analysis of housing affordability in Chapter 6, illustrates that many of the low-moderate income families are occupy the multi-family residential developments in the city. Overall, it appears that the owner-occupied housing adequately matches the existing demographics. It is important that Hoschton continue to monitor the housing and demographic conditions to identify potential deficiencies in the housing market that they may be able to help adjust through regulation.

Projections of Required Acreage by Land Use Category

To ensure that adequate land is dedicated to each land use according to future needs acreage must be projected throughout the planning horizon to ensure the future land use map meets the minimum requirements to support the anticipated growth.

To do this the Per Capita Use Rate method is used. This method extrapolates the rate of population per acre for each land use and calculates the projected acreage requirements based on the estimates established in the population element. To provide a more accurate indication of commercial and industrial requirements the Per Capita Use Rate is done using employment per acre as opposed to population.

The problem with this method is that it uses existing patterns and densities of development and reflects what will be required twenty years from now using today's standards. It is likely that residential densities will increase over time, as more compact forms of development are utilized.

What it does is point out the future impacts generated from today's development patterns and helps to visualize the urban form twenty years into the future if existing trends continue. Table 2 illustrates the projections by land use groupings.

The Use Ratio reflects how much acreage of a given land use is dedicated to each resident. It is merely an estimate and a reflection of the prevailing development patterns. As previously mentioned, the calculations for the 2023 acreage needs assume that prevailing development patterns will remain constant throughout the planning horizon, which is an unlikely scenario.

Table 2
2023 Land Area Projections

Land Use Category	Existing Acreage	Use Ratio	2023 Acreage
Total Residential	743.7	0.695	2,003
Public/Institutional*	80.2	0.075	216
Commercial/Industrial	210.1	0.436	614
Total Acreage	**1578.3**		**2,833**
Total Developed Acreage	**1034.1**		**-**
Total Undeveloped Acreage	**544.2**		**-**

Source: Calculations by NEGRDC

*Public/Institutional includes all Government uses and Transportation/Communication/Utilities.
*The Use Ratio for Commercial/Industrial uses a comparison ratio of employees per acre, as opposed to population per acre. Data is derived from Chapter 2 and reports on those employees actually working in Hoschton, as illustrated in the sections on economic base assessment and labor force assessment.

This table illustrates that existing development patterns are not sustainable and current development densities, in terms of per capita use rates, will devour what remains of the undeveloped landmass within the existing city limits. However, this does merely illustrate potential acreages based on existing development patterns. The fact that the majority of the Deer Creek and Quail Crossing developments consist of low-density housing, generally on lots at or exceeding one acre, inflates these numbers and there should not be an abundance of this type of development in the future.

As the city develops more compact neighborhoods and begins to implement mixed-use style development in the downtown, the remaining land can be used much more efficiently than what is shown. However, that does not change the notion that projected development will exceed available residential land by the year 2010. Without boundary expansion through annexation the city is likely to be built out for residential purposes within the next ten years.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use map is an important tool used in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. The map does not represent an exact pattern of development but identifies appropriate areas of opportunity for each land use category to accommodate the expected growth.

Throughout the planning horizon, real estate markets and the availability of infrastructure and services will determine the exact location and timing of development. The map is intended as a guideline for planning commissioners, staff, and elected officials to use in making development decisions. As local economics and demographics change over time, so too should the Future Land Use map. It requires periodic monitoring to ensure that development decisions are being made using the most accurate illustration of the desired future growth patterns.

Future Land Use Categories

Multi-Family Residential: Characteristically urban environment typically containing attached residential development, whether rental or owner-occupied units, of one to three stories. Typical densities are 8 units per acre, or greater. The provision of public sewerage is required for any development of this nature.

High-Density Residential: Defined as those areas capable of accommodating the expected growth throughout the planning horizon. Designed to accommodate residential uses, both attached and detached structures, with a density of greater than 2 units per acre. Other uses may include, but are not limited too, community and/or neighborhood parks, or any other use that is compatible with the surrounding residential community. It is the intent to promote and encourage development to occur within this district to take full advantage of existing and planned infrastructure.

Medium Density Residential: Generally refers to areas lacking the infrastructure necessary to accommodate high-density growth. Designated for single-family residential housing with a density of 1.01 to 2 units per acre, or any other use compatible with the residential environment.

Low-Density Residential: Defined as areas more suitable for lower development densities based on environmental factors or infrastructure constraints. Designated for single-family residential housing with a density of 1 unit, or less, per acre.

Commercial: Includes all retail and commercial service activities ranging from convenience stores to shopping malls. Businesses may be stand alone or clustered into commercial nodes. Actual uses may include, but are not limited too, hotels, restaurants, entertainment facilities, repair shops, or any other use that is compatible with a commercial/retail district.

Industrial: Includes light industrial uses. Light industrial includes, but is not limited too, warehousing and distribution, trucking, and small-scale manufacturing.

Public/Institutional: Includes certain state, federal or local institutional land uses, including but not limited too, colleges, schools, churches, cemeteries, and hospitals.

Government: Includes certain, state, federal or local government land uses, including but not limited too, city halls and government building complexes, police, fire and emergency medical services stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, and military installations.

Parks/Recreation/Conservation: This category is for land dedicated to passive or active recreational uses, or to preserving the natural features, scenic qualities, or environmental value of the designated lands. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and include, but are not limited too, playgrounds, public parks, golf courses, recreation centers, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, or river and stream corridors.

Transportation/Communication/Utility: This category may include, but is not limited too, such uses as power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, public transit stations, telephone switching stations, airports, and port facilities.

There are development concepts that are difficult to illustrate on a map, including clustered residential development and mixed-use development. The clustered developments are encouraged because of their ability to minimize

impervious surfaces and preserve greenspace. They are appropriate in all residential areas, provided there are sufficient infrastructures in place to accommodate the development.

Mixed-use development is not reflected on the map it generally refers to the combination of 2 or more land use categories, generally some form of commercial and residential, reflecting compact community concepts minimizing the reliance on the automobile for transportation. It is intended to allow for a mix of commercial, office, and residential development in the downtown core increasing the economic and community viability of the downtown historic district.

Future Land Use Acreages

Table 3 displays the total acreage figures for each land use category on the 2023 City of Hoschton Future Land Use map.

Hoschton uses the following parameters:

High-Density: Gross density of greater than 2 dwelling units per acre.
Medium-Density: Gross density of 1.01 to 2 dwelling units per acre.
Low-Density: Gross density of 1, or fewer, dwelling unit per acre.
Multi-Family: Includes duplexes and apartments.

Table 3
2023 Future Land Use Acreage

Land Use	Acres	% of Total
Total Residential	989	62.7
High Density (H/D)	*31*	*3.1*
Medium Density (M/D)	*469*	*47.4*
Low-Density (L/D)	*478*	*48.4*
Multi-Family (M/F)	*11*	*1.1*
Commercial	242	15.3
Industrial	224	14.2
Government	3	0.2
Public/Institutional (P/I)	61	3.9
Parks/Recreation/ Conservation (P/R/C)	59	3.7
Transportation/Communication/Utilities (T/C/U)	0	0.0
Totals	**1,578**	**100.0%**

Source: NEGRDC

Despite the need for more residential land the city cannot accommodate an overabundance of high-density residential development because of community facilities and infrastructure limitations. As the city invests in community facility and infrastructure expansions it is imperative that it revisit the future land use map to identify areas appropriate for increased density based on infrastructure availability. Coordination between the two elements is crucial to increasing the ability of Hoschton to accommodate future population growth without the need to physically expand the borders and unnecessarily extend utility networks.

Potential Implementation Strategies

Downtown Overlay Zoning District

In order to diversify the development of the downtown and truly create an active central business district the city intends to create a downtown overlay zone that allows for mixed-use development and promotes design flexibility. A key component of downtown revitalization is incorporating residential development into the area, ensuring that downtown businesses are accessible to pedestrian traffic. Allowing mixed-use developments will increase the amount of residents living within the downtown and will also alleviate some of the demands on existing residential designated lands.

The streetscape project, upon completion, increases the accessibility and pedestrian safety of downtown. The creation of a more flexible development environment through the implementation of a downtown overlay zone, in conjunction with the streetscape improvements, stimulates positive economic growth, increases the efficiency of land use, and strengthens the community identity.

Barriers to Growth Management

The main obstacle to effectively managing growth is public perception. The public generally views regulations as "downzoning" their land and reducing its value. The public is also generally opposed to higher densities of development, which is necessary in any growth management plan as a tradeoff to preserving greater amounts of open space and efficiently utilizing available space.

The only way to enact positive change in development patterns is through continued cooperation within, and among, local governments on a regional scale and to ensure that the public is fully aware of the planning efforts and their intended benefits.

Needs, Goals, and Policies

Goal: *Promote the orderly development of land to accommodate the anticipated growth through the protection of environmental and historic characteristics and the coordination of available public facilities.*

Need: Coordinate new development with the presence of adequate public facilities.

- Policy: Expend public resources on expansion and construction of facilities and services in areas designated for growth on the Future Land Use Map.
- Policy: Base development approval process on the ability of the existing or planned public facilities to accommodate increased use.

Need: Coordinate all new development with the Comprehensive Plan and ensure that land use and future land use information reflect current development patterns.

- Policy: Ensure that sufficient acreage has been designated on the Future Land Use map to accommodate projected growth.
- Policy: Ensure that development creates minimal impacts in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Policy: Maintain a cooperative relationship within, and among local governments to ensure the orderly development of the entire region.
- Policy: Protect the quality and integrity of existing neighborhoods through the maintenance of vegetative buffers adjacent to incompatible uses.
- Policy: Locate all industrial development in existing industrial parks and concentrate commercial development within downtown and along identified corridors.

Need: Develop a downtown overlay zone that encompasses the downtown historic district.

- Policy: Encourage creativity in development design and allow for mixed-use development within the downtown to maximize the efficient use of available land.

Need: Update Future Land Use map every two years to ensure it adequately reflects prevailing development patterns.